South Dakota State University Extension

Tree Pest Alert

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Samples

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Note: samples containing living tissue may only be accepted from South Dakota. Please do not send samples of plants or insects from other states. If you live outside of South Dakota and have a question, please send a digital picture of the pest or problem.

Any treatment recommendations, including those identifying specific pesticides, are for the convenience of the reader. Pesticides mentioned in this publication are generally those that are most commonly available to the public in South Dakota and the inclusion of a product shall not be taken as an endorsement or the exclusion a criticism regarding effectiveness. Please read and follow all label instructions as the label is the final authority for a product's use on a pest or plant. Products requiring a commercial pesticide license are occasionally mentioned if there are limited options available. These products will be identified as such, but it is the reader's responsibility to determine if they can legally apply any products identified in this publication.

Reviewed by Master Gardeners: Bess Pallares, Carrie Moore, and Dawnee Lebeau

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Plant development for the growing season

We are at 0.5 growing degree days (GDD). Nothing starts this early and all our woody plants are still in their deepest dormancy. Most of the trees and shrubs we have in our yards and communities can tolerate -30ºF at this time. So far, the low in Aberdeen, Rapid City, and Sioux Falls has only been -19º, -13º and -10ºF respectively.

Treatments to Begin Now

No plant or pest treatments needed now. The only one of caution is the application of de-icing salts. The roller-coaster temperature swings have meant a lot of freezing and thawing so sidewalks are slick. This is being managed with de-icing salts. But just as we all need to reduce the salt in our diet, reducing salt in the landscape is also a good idea. Just use enough to loosen the ice so it can be shoveled off. Sand is even better.

Timely Topics

Emerald ash borer update

So far this has been a mild winter in the Sioux Falls area with -10ºF the lowest recorded temperature. This means we have minimal cold mortality of emerald ash borer larvae so far this winter. All the larvae in our latest sampling were deep in the sapwood in their overwintering chamber, well protected from this cold. We will need some cold weather – about -30ºF or lower -this winter to have significant emerald ash borer winter mortality.

Pruning a Kentucky coffeetree whip

I had an interesting question about pruning a bare-root or containerized Kentucky coffeetree whips. These are long, slender stems that lack branches. You can purchase most trees as whips, but it seems that catalpa, honeylocust, and Kentucky coffeetree are the very long

ones, often 7 to 9 feet or more! They can look like someone stuck a fishing pole in the ground.

They will stay that way for a long time if no one trains them. The training in this instance is tough love. A heading cut is made a little below where the first branch is desired. If a 9-foot whip is planted, and branching at 7 feet is desired, the heading cut is made at about 5 feet.

The tree will sprout within 6 or so inches below the heading cut. Catalpa and honeylocust will send out three or four sprouts, Kentucky coffeetree often only two. The sprouts are allowed to grow the first season and then all but one is removed at their base. The remaining one will become the new stem and it will start producing branches.

Since the new trunk is coming out of the side of the old one, there will be a slight, visible crook for the first couple of years. After that period, it will be near impossible to detect that the new stem originated from a heading cut.

The pruning is done either at planting in the spring or a year after planting. If delayed a year, the pruning should be done in late April or early May, just prior to bud break.

A final note. First, I prefer to see branched trees planted rather than long whips. Second, I do not recommend heading on whips unless they are catalpa or Kentucky coffeetree. Whips of most other tree species will eventually produce branches along the trunk. It is catalpa and Kentucky coffeetrees that seem to stay a pole!

E-samples

Banded ash borers in house

An e-sample I have come to expect every year is a picture of a banded ash borer adult found in a house or other building – wherever firewood is stored.

The banded ash borer is a native insect and can be found inhabiting dead and dying ash trees. Since they are common in dying ash, they are often confused with emerald ash borer. They can also be found in firewood cut last fall from infested trees.

Emerald ash borer adults are not flying now, even out from firewood brought into the home. They are deep in the sapwood of the tree as curled larvae and seem to remain so even if brought inside. We have placed logs in cages inside in February to collect parasitoids and the adults seem to emerge only a couple of weeks earlier – mid-May – not months earlier.

The banded ash borers spend the winter as pupa, through there will be some larvae present. This means they emerge as adults as soon as the weather warms in the spring. I have seen them swarming around declining ash in windbreaks on warm, sunny April days. This also means a warm house in the winter can fool the beetle into completing its development and emerging much sooner.

The banded ash borer adults are about 1/2 to 3/4-inches long, cylindrical and taped towards the end of the abdomen. The adults are grayish black but have very distinct bands on the thorax and wing covers. The banding may be ivory or yellow with four bands running across the body. The two bands closest to towards the head will meet almost appearing as circles, one on each wing cover.

The adults will fly towards windows if they emerge in the house. They will not attack furniture, people, or pets, though might be a fun distraction for cats.

Pine engraver beetles in treetops

Matt, our service forester in Hot Springs sent me this picture of bark that came off the top of a ponderosa pine tree. The inside of the bark has the classic Y-shaped pattern of galleries for pine engraver beetles. The Y is constructed by three female beetles and the shorter tunnels coming out from them are the larval galleries from their offspring.

The tunnels are empty now as the adults are wintering in the duff beneath the tree (though some spend the winter under the bark). This spring, usually in April, when the temperatures stay warm, the adults will fly to green slash and fallen branches. They will burrow in and start a new family.

Green slash that is laid down and pile later this winter is very attractive to pine engraver beetles. These beetles require fresh green material to feed on but usually are not able to attack healthy trees. If the green slash attracts beetles in large numbers this spring, they can raise many young in the pile.

The problem is the pile will dry out and the new generation of adults that come out in May or June will need to seek out a new home. If there is no fresh slash, they may attack live trees, or at least their tops, especially if the trees are drought-stress.

Samples received/Site visits

Minnehaha County, bark shredded off hackberry branches

This call is a frequent one during mid to late winter. The concern is bark being stripped from branches of hackberry, elm, or basswood. The stripping is usually a 1/2-inch wide or so and about four or five inches long. Some shredded bark is usually still attached to the wood by fine strands. The damage is more common on branches than the trunk and often it is only the upper side of the branch.

The culprit is a squirrel. Why they do this is not completely known. One common thought is the squirrels are after the tasty inner bark. The inner bark is where sugars are found in the spring and it can be sweet (to a squirrel that never ate a Snickers bar). Another theory is pregnant females may feed on the bark as a distraction from pregnancy pain. And finally, they might just be doing it for fun.

Regardless of the reason, this feeding damage can girdle a branch which can result in dieback. I have seen hackberries that have leaves on certain branches turn yellow in the summer, then wilt and die. A closer examination of these branches reveals girdling by squirrels during the previous winter.

Unfortunately, in town there is not much that can be done to stop or discourage the feeding. The best advice is do not encourage them by hanging bird feeder in the tree that will only attract more squirrels!